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Attorney forms group to assist landowners, developers

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Nick Wood, a land-use and development attorney with Phoenix law firm Snell & Wilmer LLP, had an idea during the dismal months of 2009 about how to pass time during the Great Recession.

He decided to pull together a dream team of sorts, though he won't call it that —

people who have been involved in the development community, and use their expertise in a creative way.

His "design collaborative" includes a planner, engineer, architect, landscape architect, real estate broker, contractor, traffic consultant and public policy expert, plus a few fellow attorneys. They've been meeting regularly for 18 months to create business and provide a service to developers and landowners whose plans fell by the wayside when the economy crashed in fall 2008.

"In light of the reset button, I thought perhaps we should help the process and reach out to developers, investors and property owners," Wood said.

He wanted to assemble the best group he could.

"Every person around this table has been doing what we do for more than 25 years, and doing it in the Valley," Wood said. "If you look at the majority of major projects completed here, at least one of these people worked on those projects."

Though Wood won't disclose the parties the group is helping, he said they've attracted interest from a variety of people. His team looks at each property and its current entitlements, and figures out what would really work at that location in the new economy. Many of the developments planned aren't feasible anymore, and the people associated with them are baffled about what to do next.



Wood

Wood points to the expertise of team member Don Arones, executive vice president of Cassidy Turley BRE Commercial in Phoenix.

"He has his finger on the marketplace and might say, 'No, that will never work,'" Wood said.

So how do they figure out what will work?

The team takes all past work that's been done, then analyzes and reconfigures it. They create a PowerPoint presentation of their findings and recommendations.

"We put together a plan, and we don't charge anything other than they might buy us lunch," Wood said.

He estimates that the collaborative teamwork is worth at least \$50,000 per project in the real market.

"Normally, an owner would have to pay to assemble a team like this," said Steve Bassett, principal architect at adm group inc in Tempe.

So why are they giving free advice?

The hope is that some of the developers and landowners eventually will come to them as paying customers to follow through on the recommendations.

"They may only want to hire some people in the group, and that's perfectly fine," Arones said.

Wood's business development plan may be unique, but other land attorneys also have ferreted out creative solutions.

Grady Gammage, a principal at Gammage & Burnham PC, said he is talking more to industry groups. He's also penned a number of reports on Arizona growth issues, including "Watering the Sun Corridor," to be released this summer.

"That sort of thing increases visibility," he said.

Others in his firm are employing similar strategies on their own, he said.



Bassett

DREAM TEAM

- **Don Arones**, Cassidy Turley BRE Commercial
- **Steve Bassett**, adm group inc.
- **Alan Beaudoin**, LVA Urban Design Studio
- **Dawn Cartier**, CivTech
- **Noel Griemsmann**, Snell & Wilmer LLP
- **Dick Mallery**, Snell & Wilmer
- **Dick Reese**, Hensel Phelps Construction Co.
- **Billy Shields**, Shields Consulting/Public Policy Partners
- **Joe Villasenor**, Villasenor & Associates
- **Darrell Wilson**, HilgartWilson
- **Nick Wood**, Snell & Wilmer



Cartier



Reese

While a number of Wood's team members are business owners, some are not. What do their companies think about their employees investing so much time in an effort that might not work out?

"Hensel Phelps supports this and considers it a good cost of doing business," said Dick Reese, a project development specialist at Hensel Phelps Construction Co.

Dawn Cartier, president of CivTech, a transportation consulting firm in Scottsdale, said she was enthusiastic from the get-go.

"I didn't have to give it much thought. Some of the people in this room were my first clients," she said. "This is worth it, and I'd do it regardless."

They also reap some added benefits.

"I learn something new whenever I sit down with these people," said Alan Beaudoin, principal of LVA Urban Design Studio in Tempe.

"We think we are one of the most formidable groups around," said Wood.